

2020 NATIVITY MESSAGE OF ARCHBISHOP PAUL

Since March of this year, our faith has been tested by the pandemic. Some have left parishes that wear masks or use other methods of giving communion to attend other parishes that don't follow these practices. Some are afraid to go to church for fear of getting the virus. In the case of people 65 and older, this is understandable because many of them may be at high risk due to other health care issues. Attendance at church has been limited because of the continued huge increase of people coming down with Covid 19 (recently over 245,000 cases in one day were reported in our country); deaths have increased as well. Hospital beds are filling up again with people who have come down with the virus. Everyone has their own opinions about how this virus is being dealt with in our churches. This has intensified the discord among some people over this.

We have seen black men and women killed by the police leading to peaceful protests and demonstrations. Unfortunately others have used this terrible tragedy to justify the intentional, violent looting and destruction of property. This has only intensified peoples' fears and done more harm to local businesses.

People are suffering from depression, and despair; some have lost their jobs and some businesses have closed due to the virus and the restrictions placed on them by state and local authorities.

As we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord this year, what do our worship and the wisdom of our Holy Fathers offer to help us make sense of this? I put before you this day the examples of two men, King Herod of Judea, and Joseph, the Betrothed to the Virgin Mary and foster father of our Lord. Both dealt with this Good News in entirely different manners. One of the verses from the 9th Royal Hour describes Herod's response:

Herod was filled with alarm when he saw the righteous wise men. Overcome by fury, he determined precisely when the child was born. Mothers were robbed of their infants: Their tender lives were reaped as a bitter harvest. Milk stopped flowing and breasts dried up. Great was the suffering! Therefore assemble in holy fear, O faithful, to worship the birth of Christ! (Verse

from the 9th Hour of the Nativity Royal Hours)
King Herod initially deceived the wise men to find out how he could see the Infant in Bethlehem in order to "worship Him." But this was not the case. The gospel states Herod "in a furious rage" slew all the infants under two when the wise men left him (Matthew 2:16). St Gregory Palamas gives us an insight into the nature of this rage in his homily on the Nativity:

The author of evil (Lucifer) did not want to be lower than any of the angels, but to be equal in excellence to the Creator Himself; he was the first to suffer the terrible fall before anyone else. Smitten by envy, he deceitfully attacked Adam and dragged him down to the abyss of Hades by means of the same desire. By so doing, he made Adam's fall difficult to reverse, and it required God's extraordinary presence, which has now been accomplished, to restore him. His own fall (Lucifer's), however, he rendered incurable once and for all, because he did not acquire his arrogance from anyone else, but became himself the principle of evil and fullness of evil, and made himself available to anyone wishing to participate in evil. (St. Gregory Palamas, On the Nativity)

Herod's arrogance and pride blinded him from the experience and joy of this blessed event. The birth of the Divine Infant in the Cave posed a threat to him, which he could not tolerate. He wanted to be treated as an equal to God and not as an earthly king. He became a participant in evil and killed 14000 innocent infants thinking he would kill the Divine Infant born in the Cave. We now turn to Joseph the Betrothed where we see something different.

When Joseph went up to Bethlehem, his heart was filled with sadness. But you cried out to him, O Virgin: Why are you so troubled? Why are you in misery seeing me with a child? Do you not understand at all? I bear a fearful mystery! Cast your fears away, and learn a strange wonder: God in His mercy descends from heaven to earth. Within my womb He has taken flesh! When He is pleased to be born you will see Him. You will rejoice, and worship Him, your Creator. The angels ceaselessly praise Him in song, glorifying Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit. (Verse from the 9th Hour of the Royal Nativity Hours)

Joseph was beset with doubt and was initially bothered by this news. He may have been scandalized and because of this news, **Con't Pg 10**

Archbishop Message Con't

sought to divorce Mary quietly so as to not shame her (Matthew 1:19). The words from the above verse of the 9th Hour of the Nativity show that something different was going on with Joseph. Mary issues a poetic plea to him to “cast your fears away, and learn a strange wonder.” By so doing He will come to “rejoice, and worship Him, your Creator.” What was in Joseph’s heart that allowed him to conquer his initial doubt and sadness? Once again we turn to St. Gregory of Palamas:

Now since it was God’s good pleasure to annul the pretext for that pride which brought down His rational creatures, He makes everything like Himself...He makes the creation equal to itself by grace and equal in honor. And how was this done? The very word of God from God emptied Himself in an indescribable way, came down from on high to the lowest state of man’s nature, and indissolubly linked it with Himself, and in humbling Himself and becoming poor like us, He raised on high the things below, or rather, He gathered both things into one, mingling humanity with divinity, and by so doing, He taught everyone that humility is the road which leads upwards, setting forth today Himself as an example before men and holy angels alike. (St. Gregory Palamas, On the Nativity)

Joseph may have been sad and troubled, but not angry or bitter. His heart was open to being taught. More importantly, he was open to embracing this road to humility that led to the Divine Infant in the Cave. Here he would learn the Good News concerning our Incarnate Lord:

Today heaven and earth are united, for Christ is born. Today God has come to earth, and man ascends to heaven. Today God, who by nature cannot be seen, is seen in the flesh for our sake. Let us glorify Him, crying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace! Your coming has brought peace to us: Glory to You, our Savior! (Litya verse of the Nativity)

We have a choice that is set before us this day. Let us renounce the pride and arrogance of King Herod who rejected the Divine Infant in the Cave. This hardness can find its way into us if we do not guard our heart. This way only leads to death where there is no hope. Do not let the events of this past year lead us to the point that we become resentful, bitter and arrogant. This is nothing more than the vice of

Pride.

The other choice before us is the example of Joseph; he was tested as he had doubts. He wondered if this really was “Good News” that Mary was to give birth to our Lord. But he heard the voice of the angel who visited him; he heard the voice of the Virgin Mother who encouraged him. He was lead to the Divine Infant in the Cave, and embraced Him with joy. It was the virtue of humility that led him there. Let this be the choice we make leading to life. This will not only enable us to cope with the temptations the events the last 9 months have brought us, **but to conquer them in Christ!**

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

With love in Christ,
Archbishop Paul



Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God Commemorated on [December 26](#)

On the second day of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church has established the celebration of the Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God. The name of today's festival signifies the gathering of the faithful in order to praise and glorify the All-Holy Virgin, who gave birth to our Savior.

On the first day of the Nativity of the Lord, the Church glorifies the Redeemer of the human race, and the blessed deliverance which freed the sinful world from the snares of the Enemy. On the second day of the Nativity of the Lord, which was such a great event for our salvation, the Church calls upon us to honor the Ever-Virgin Mary, the Mother of our Lord, in an appropriate manner. *Con't Next Page*

Mother of God Con't

The day after many of the Church's Feast Days is called the Synaxis - such as the day after the Nativity of the Theotokos, when the righteous Joachim and Anna are commemorated; or the day following the Feast of Theophany, when we honor Saint John the Baptist, etc.

The Feast of the Synaxis of the Mother of God dates back to very ancient times. In the IV century, some Holy Fathers, such as Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus (May 12), were already preaching about it.

In the ancient Menaia, the Feast of the Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos was called "the Nativity Gifts." This refers to the gifts which the Magi from the East brought to the newborn King of the Jews - the Divine Child Jesus. The Feast of the Synaxis of the Mother of God was also called "the Flight into Egypt."

On December 26, the early Church commemorated the Wise Men who came to worship the Savior, and the flight into Egypt, as well as the Synaxis of the Mother of God. That is why some icons of the Nativity of the Lord depict His Birth, the worship of the shepherds and the Magi, as well as the Flight into Egypt. Sometimes the inscription reads "The Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos."

Now, however, we commemorate "the Adoration of the Magi: Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthasar, and also the shepherds in Bethlehem who were watching their flocks and came to see the Lord" on the first day of the Nativity (December 25), but the Flight into Egypt is commemorated separately on December 26, the second day of the Nativity.

Before the massacre of the 14,000 Holy Innocents (December 29), an Angel warned Saint Joseph to take the Child and His Mother and flee to Egypt and to remain there until the Angel brought him word that it was safe for him to return to Nazareth, "for Herod will seek the child to destroy him" (Matthew 2:13).

In the icon of the Flight into Egypt there are mountains. The Virgin sits on a donkey with her Child, looking back at Joseph. He holds a staff,

and his cloak is thrown over his shoulder. A young man (Tradition says this was Saint Joseph's son James, the Brother of the Lord) leads the donkey carrying a rush basket, and looks back at the Virgin. Behind them is a fortified town with idols toppling from the walls. This event was prophesied by Isaiah: "Behold, the Lord sits on a swift cloud,¹ and shall come to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and their heart shall faint within them" (Isaiah 19:1); and the Prophet Hosea alludes to it: "Out of Egypt have I called my Son" (Hosea 11:1). This is also mentioned in the Church's hymns.

¹ On the Great Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (Sticheron 4 on the Praises), that cloud is seen as an image, or type, of the Virgin.



Galatians 1:11-19

(Epistle, Sunday After)

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

Matthew 2:13-23 (Gospel, Sunday After)

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."



Matthew 21:33-42 (Gospel, Saint Stephen)

Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Christmas Greetings *from Father Andrew*

Christ Is Born! Glorify Him!

I greet you on this joyous Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. This has been, to say the least, a most unusual year filled with many distractions, worries and fears. But today let's put all of that in perspective. When we have faith and trust in the Lord during good and bad times, He sees us through. When you reflect on your life, I am sure you find that to be true. We fear nothing because of this day; a day full with love, joy and hope. We must continue to carry this through our lives so it helps to keep us focused on the real journey; the journey to inherit eternal life.

Without this day, there would be no Pascha. Without this day there would be no Christian Church.

Whatever is bothering us, take it to the manger and leave it for Jesus. Let the baby Jesus, our God, take care of it and let us be faithful servants.

I extend to all of you and your families a Blessed Feast Day!

Christos Razdajetsja! Slavite Jeho!

Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen
Commemorated on [December 27](#)

The Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen was the eldest of the seven deacons, appointed by the Apostles themselves, and therefore he is called “archdeacon.” He was the first Christian martyr, and he suffered for Christ when he was about thirty. In the words of Asterias, he was “the starting point of the martyrs, the instructor of suffering for Christ, the foundation of righteous confession, since Stephen was the first to shed his blood for the Gospel.”

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Saint Stephen preached Christianity and defeated Jewish teachers of the Law in debate. The Jews maligned Saint Stephen, saying that he had uttered blasphemy against God and against Moses. Saint Stephen came before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest to answer these charges. He gave a fiery speech, in which he recounted the history of the Jewish nation, and denounced the Jews for persecuting the prophets, and also for executing the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ (Acts ch. 7).

During his speech, Saint Stephen suddenly saw the heavens opened and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. The Jews shouted and covered their ears, and rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and stoned him, but the holy martyr prayed for his murderers. Far off on the heights stood the Mother of God with the holy Apostle John the Theologian, and She prayed fervently for the martyr. Before his death Saint Stephen said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Then he joyfully gave up his pure soul to Christ.

The body of the holy Protomartyr Stephen, left to be eaten by beasts, was secretly taken up by the Jewish teacher Gamaliel and his son Habib, who buried Stephen on his estate. They both believed in Christ, and later received holy Baptism.

Saint Stephen is also commemorated on August 2 (Translation of his relics) and on September 15 (Uncovering of his relics in the year 415).

**DECEMBER CANDLE &
BULLETIN SPONSORS**

Bulletin: (\$50) From Father Andrew in memory of my family members deceased in the month of December

Chandelier: (\$50) From the Elcisko Family in memory of their mother Helen, father George, & brother George Michael; From Jean for the health & blessings received for my family & all the parishioners of H. A.

Altar Candles: (\$50) From Basil in memory of his god-parents John & Helen Beadle

Candles on the Tomb: (\$25) From Peter & Judy in memory of Peter’s great grandparents Michael & Mary Hritsko

Eternal Light & Icon Screen: (25) From Jean in memory of her father, William Pipenur

**JANUARY CANDLE &
BULLETIN SPONSORS**

Bulletin: (\$50) From Fr. Andrew in memory of his dad, George

Chandelier: (\$50) From Valerie S. in memory of her mom Violet Bargdill

Altar Candles: (\$50) Open

Candles on the Tomb: (\$25) Fr. Andrew in memory of his God-mother, Helen

Eternal Light & Icon Screen: (\$25) Open



Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-5, 47-60 (Epistle, Saint)

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. But Solomon built Him a house.

However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?' You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it." When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right

hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

TENTATIVE SINGERS

Friday, Dec. 25: Natalie, Susan, Tim & Fred
Saturday, Dec. 26: Natalie, Tim & Susan
Sunday, Dec. 27: Natalie, Laura, Fred & Tim
Thursday, Dec. 31: Natalie, Susan, Fred & Tim
Friday, Jan 1, 2021: Natalie, Susan, Tim
Sunday, Jan 3: Natalie, Susan, Tim & Fred

Need one singer for:

Saturday, Dec. 26
Friday, Jan 1, 2021

TENTATIVE READERS

Friday, Dec. 25: Terri
Saturday, Dec. 26: Tim
Sunday, Dec. 27: Terri
Friday, Jan 1: 2021 Tim
Sunday, Jan 3 Terri

Archbishop Paul's Travel Schedule:

December 24 to January 10th

Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago, IL,

December 24th to 25th, Nativity Services

St. Stephen, Lima, OH,

December 26th to 27th

Archangel Michael Church, Burbank, IL,

January 2nd to 3rd

Holy Trinity Cathedral, Chicago, IL,

January 5th to 6th, Theophany services

Ss. Peter & Paul, Lorain, OH,

January 8th to 10th

The Nativity of our Lord God and Savior

Jesus Christ

Commemorated on [December 25](#)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, was born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem during the reign of the emperor Augustus (Octavian). Caesar Augustus decreed that a universal census be made throughout his Empire, which then also included Palestinian Israel. The Jews were accustomed to be counted in the city from where their family came. The Most Holy Virgin and the Righteous Joseph, since they were descended from the house and lineage of King David, had to go to Bethlehem to be counted and taxed.

In Bethlehem they found no room at any of the city's inns. Thus, the God-Man, the Savior of the world, was born in a cave that was used as a stable.

"I behold a strange and most glorious mystery," the Church sings with awe, "Heaven, a Cave; the Virgin the Throne of the Cherubim; the Manger a room, in which Christ, the God Whom nothing can contain is laid." (Irmos of the 9th Ode of the Nativity Canon).

Having given birth to the divine Infant without travail, the Most Holy Virgin "wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). In the stillness of midnight (Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-15), the proclamation of the birth of the Savior of the world was heard by three shepherds watching their flocks by night.

An angel of the Lord (Saint Cyprian says this was Gabriel) came before them and said: "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). The humble shepherds were the first to offer worship to Him Who condescended to assume the form of a humble servant for the salvation of mankind. Besides the glad tidings to the Bethlehem shepherds, the Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Theophylactus, commenting on Saint Matthew's Gospel, say that this was no ordinary star. Rather, it was "a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star." Saint Demetrius of Rostov says it was a "manifestation of divine energy" (Narrative of the Adoration of the Magi). Entering the house where the Infant lay, the Magi "fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and

myrrh" (Mt. 2:11).

The present Feast, commemorating the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, was established by the Church. Its origin goes back to the time of the Apostles. In the Apostolic Constitutions (Section 3, 13) it says, "Brethren, observe the feastdays; and first of all the Birth of Christ, which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month." In another place it also says, "Celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, on which unseen grace is given man by the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world."

In the second century Saint Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25. In the third century Saint Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of Saint Matthew.

In 302, during the persecution of Christians by Maximian, 20,000 Christians of Nicomedia (December 28) were burned in church on the very Feast of the Nativity of Christ. In that same century, after the persecution when the Church had received freedom of religion and had become the official religion in the Roman Empire, we find the Feast of the Nativity of Christ observed throughout the entire Church. There is evidence of this in the works of Saint Ephraim the Syrian, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Ambrose of Milan, Saint John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church of the fourth century.

Saint John Chrysostom, in a sermon which he gave in the year 385, points out that the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is ancient, and indeed very ancient. In this same century, at the Cave of Bethlehem, made famous by the Birth of Jesus Christ, the empress Saint Helen built a church, which her mighty son Constantine adorned after her death. In the Codex of the emperor Theodosius from 438, and of the emperor Justinian in 535, the universal celebration of the day of the Nativity of Christ was decreed by law. Thus, Nicephorus Callistus, a writer of the fourteenth century, says in his History that in the sixth century, the emperor Justinian established the celebration of the Nativity of Christ throughout all the world.

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Christmas Con't

Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople in the fifth century, Sophronius and Andrew of Jerusalem in the seventh, Saints John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maium and Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople in the eighth, the Nun Cassiane in the ninth, and others whose names are unknown, wrote many sacred hymns for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, which are still sung by the Church on this radiant festival.

During the first three centuries, in the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Cyprus, the Nativity of Christ was combined together with the Feast of His Baptism on January 6, and called "Theophany" ("Manifestation of God"). This was because of a belief that Christ was baptized on anniversary of His birth, which may be inferred from Saint John Chrysostom's sermon on the Nativity of Christ: "it is not the day on which Christ was born which is called Theophany, but rather that day on which He was baptized."

In support of such a view, it is possible to cite the words of the Evangelist Luke who says that "Jesus began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23) when He was baptized. The joint celebration of the Nativity of Christ and His Theophany continued to the end of the fourth century in certain Eastern Churches, and until the fifth or sixth century in others.

The present order of services preserves the memory of the ancient joint celebration of the Feasts of the Nativity of Christ and Theophany. On the eve of both Feasts, there is a similar tradition that one should fast until the stars appear. The order of divine services on the eve of both feastdays and the feastdays themselves is the same.

The Nativity of Christ has long been counted as one of the Twelve Great Feasts. It is one of the greatest, most joyful and wondrous events in the history of the world. "The angel said to the shepherds, 'Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' Then suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, glorifying God and saying: 'Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward

men.' Those who heard these things were astonished at what the shepherds told them concerning the Child. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:10-20).

Thus the Nativity of Christ, a most profound and extraordinary event, was accompanied by the wondrous tidings proclaimed to the shepherds and to the Magi. This is a cause of universal rejoicing for all mankind, "for the Savior is Born!"

Concurring with the witness of the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church, in their God-inspired writings, describe the Feast of the Nativity of Christ as most profound, and joyous, serving as the basis and foundation for all the other Feasts.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!



IMPORTANT MESSAGE

In order to close the books for 2020, please make sure your year-end donations are received by Sunday, December 27.

Any donations received after Sunday, December 27 will be added to your 2021 contribution record.

Thank You for your understanding and cooperation.